

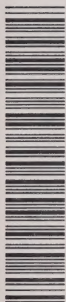
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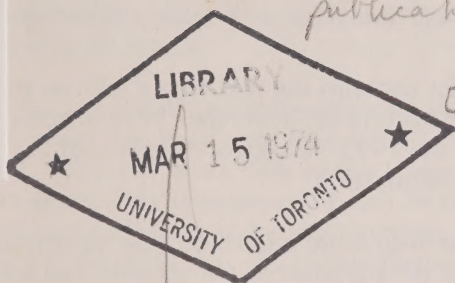
Principal Priority for Ontario

*"Seldom has an organized society seen
a greater and more successful effort to
realize a major social objective."*



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Remarks by the
Honourable Thomas L. Wells,
Minister of Education, Ontario,
to the Ontario Legislature,
November 15, 1973



This booklet contains the text of my address to the Ontario Legislature on November 19 in introducing for debate the 1973-74 budget estimates of the Ministry of Education.

It has never been more important that all citizens be aware of the purposes of our schools, and the ways in which we are attempting to achieve these goals.

This booklet outlines many of the advancements, past and present, which have been undertaken to make our schools better for our young people.

Thomas L. Wells

Thomas L. Wells,
Minister of Education

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1

Aims of education

In presenting the estimates of the Ministry of Education for this year, I feel it proper that we discuss in general terms the aims and objectives of the school system of Ontario, and the means by which we are seeking to achieve these aims.

The exercise of trying to define the aims of education in concise terms can become rather academic because it is so easy to stray among pretentious generalities that may have little relationship to actual practice or the real world. Very often, the most scholarly attempts to define the purpose of the schools in today's society result in statements that lack a sense of reality for those who have daily contact with young people, either at home or in the school.

In clear and simple terms, however, it can be said that the fundamental purpose of our schools is to prepare young people as well as possible for the life they will lead as adults in our democratic society. The schools should help each student develop to the maximum of his potential as an individual and as a member of society who will think clearly, feel deeply and act wisely.

Many parents would correctly interpret this basic aim to mean that they want their children to learn to read, write and speak their native language with reasonable facility (English or French, as the case may be), to learn how to handle numbers, to develop social skills that will enable them to live and work with others, to acquire an understanding and appreciation of their country—and to supplement all of this with useful knowledge that will relate to a successful and satisfying life.

Without doubt, the foundation of any sound educational program begins with the basic skills. Our children must acquire the ability to read and write and handle numbers because the three R's still constitute the price of admission to our adult society, and no child should pass through our schools without acquiring those skills.

There is another skill which has become a priority for today's young people, and this is the ability to adapt readily to a changing environment, and to evaluate and solve new problems. Adaptability and the capacity to solve problems are more difficult to teach, more difficult to learn, and more difficult to evaluate than the ability to read and write, but they are no less essential.

A corollary of this is the need to teach people *how* to learn, how to seek out information and how to use it properly and wisely. The statement that "education is a lifelong process" is rapidly becoming a reality, and the schools now must consciously help pupils develop investigative and analytical capabilities that will sustain them through the years.

2 Need for personal virtues

While an emphasis on skill development is a basic priority of our education system, our schools must also build upon that foundation to help pupils acquire certain attitudes in the process, and to develop some personal virtues and strength of character along the way. Our schools should help young people acquire a taste for excellence and a willingness to pursue it—as well as the self-discipline and perseverance that will permit them to attain their goals.

Students must gain respect for themselves and others, and develop moral standards that will give them direction throughout their lifetimes. The schools must help develop in students an appreciation of the way our society functions, and the ability to live harmoniously with others. And the schools have a responsibility to help our young people understand our cultural heritage and develop a sense of patriotism—an awareness of their place in the society of man, and Canada's place in the society of nations.

These kinds of objectives obviously present to our educational system an enormous challenge, made all the more difficult by the fact that the past experience of today's generation of parents and

educators has seemed to become somewhat less useful in guiding today's young—because the world of today is so vastly different than the world we knew in our youth—and the world of tomorrow will doubtless be vastly different again.

It is not like earlier days, in the last century and the first half of this one, when the character and pace of Ontario society changed only gradually through the years. In those times, it was not difficult for the schools to make appropriate adjustments to keep pace.

3 The post war years

However, with the end of World War II, the stage was set for a period of dramatic and rapid change in our society—the likes of which had not been seen previously, and the end of which, if ever there is an end, none of us will likely see in our lifetimes.

The new demands of a fast-changing society posed a great challenge for our educators to react and adapt appropriately, and it was a number of years before tangible evidence of real change was evident. But change there was, in the fifties and the sixties.

Look at what the schools face today—a society in which specific skills, particularly occupational skills, become obsolete as fast as new ones are developed—a society whose culture and values are subject to a daily bewildering bombardment of ideas, images, impressions and information via the media—a society in which nothing is accepted without question—a society in which young people insist on perceiving and judging by their *own* terms of reference, rather than passively accepting someone else's version of truth, justice, right and wrong.

Our educators, with no more claim to prophetic abilities than the rest of us, can only conclude that their best contribution is to lay a firm foundation of facts and skills in the early years of a child's

education—and to sharpen intellectual curiosity and stimulate a thirst for continuous learning.

The adoption of this approach has implied some revolutionary changes in traditional approaches to education. Most particularly, it makes motivation a matter of supreme importance, and this has led to a great deal of emphasis being placed on the development of the individual as such.

A major explanation for this is an increasing acceptance of the fact that motivation to learn—and the capacity to learn—are entirely individual matters. We are moving away from the time when children were grouped and categorized solely by age, and are now recognizing differing abilities in order to make education more of an individualized process.

The changes in our society during the last 25 years have had much impact on the schools, not only in Ontario but throughout the world as well. These changes have been reflected in tremendous progress in Ontario education. In these days of some disillusionment caused by a feeling that education has somehow failed to solve all our social problems, it is easy to forget what an extraordinary achievement we have to our credit.

Seldom has an organized society seen a greater and more successful effort to realize a major social objective.

4 The challenge of numbers

Immediately after the war, the main challenge was one of numbers. The effects of the greatly increased birth rate and the new surge of immigration hit the elementary schools of Ontario like a great wave. In the early 1950's Premier Leslie Frost used to refer to the abundance of young people as "Ontario's gold", seeing in them the promise of a bright future for the province.

At that stage, however, the practical demand was for hundreds of new schools and a huge investment

in equipment. And new teachers had to be found from among an abnormally small pool of people, the result of the low birth rate of the depression years.

In 1950, there were less than three quarters of a million students in elementary and secondary schools throughout Ontario. By the end of the 1960's we had almost two million students. In twenty years we had successfully accommodated a new pupil population about the size of the cities of Ottawa, Hamilton, Windsor, London and Sudbury combined.

To do it, we spent over \$2-1/4 billion to build the equivalent of a new elementary school and a new secondary school for every week in the twenty-year period. We increased by almost twenty-fold our total annual investment in elementary and secondary education, raising it from \$113 million in 1950 to over \$2 billion twenty years later.

But despite the urgency of the numbers crisis during the 1950's and 1960's, it was never a preoccupation. Especially since 1960, the tangible improvements made in Ontario education are vivid testimony to the fact that our educators always had their priorities in the right order. The classroom has always come first.

5 Better teachers

A major advancement in the 1960's was the steady improvement in the qualifications of those teaching in Ontario classrooms. The difficulties of the previous decade, which pressed into service many teachers with only minimum levels of education, gradually gave way to a healthier situation where our resources of educated young people eligible for teaching increased enormously.

Still, there remained through the 1960's a shortage of well-qualified teachers in Ontario, primarily because enrolments continued to rise rapidly and also because staff-student ratios improved significantly. For many new teachers, the process of teacher-training continued to be relegated to

speeded-up programs in summer school. By the end of the sixties, however, we began to see a reversal of the main trend that caused the teacher shortage; school enrolment stabilized, and in some cases declined, because of lower birth rates and reduced immigration.

It is, of course, difficult to be philosophical about the present situation if one is an experienced teacher fearful that his job is threatened by the existence of many would-be replacements, or if one is newly-prepared for teaching and looking for a first position. But the passing of the seller's market in teaching has had some very promising implications for the quality of education. Today, all school boards, even those in relatively remote areas, can make a real choice from among a number of applicants—rather than, as before, having to take available candidates fully qualified or not.

Within a very short period, we have been able to raise the minimum requirement for elementary school teaching from grade 12 graduation to a university degree. At the same time, with the majority of teacher-training programs now under the aegis of universities, prospective teachers should experience superior preparatory programs that will be reflected in even more creative teaching in the years to come.

Parallel to these developments have been a number of other trends that have steadily added to the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Thirteen years ago in Ontario, in 1960, there was one teacher for every 31 elementary school children; today there is a teacher for every 25 children. In the same period, the pupil-teacher ratio in our secondary schools fell from 23:1 to about 17:1.

This significant decline has in some places been reversed by one or two percentage points in the last year or two, but this has been more an aberration than a new trend.

The greatly reduced pupil-teacher ratio has had significant implications. It has given school boards the opportunity to reduce the size of classes to levels more appropriate to quality education. And superior administrative and back-up services, such

as those provided by consultants and guidance personnel, have lightened the teachers' burden and increased the effectiveness of their efforts.

All of these trends affecting teachers and their working conditions have helped us move ever closer towards attaining the goals which we place before our schools. But these developments have not evolved in isolation; they have been supplemented by a variety of supportive trends as well, which maintained for Ontario its position of educational leadership among Canadian provinces and beyond.

6 Better courses

Through the 1960's a great effort was brought to bear on curriculum reform. While most of the traditional curriculum material was retained over the years, we made room for many new approaches and new courses to better serve the real needs of pupils.

At the high school level, we developed a network of composite schools with well-equipped business and technical departments scattered throughout the province, giving more emphasis to vocational preparation than had previously been the case.

Parallel to this, the Ontario secondary school greatly broadened its appeal to many more young people. In 1950, the total secondary school enrolment was only 41 per cent of the 15 to 19-year-old age group; by 1970 that figure had grown to over 80 per cent. In 1950, only 39 per cent of the students entering grade 9 continued on into grade 12; by 1970 that figure had risen to 73 per cent.

Over a period of years, the rigidities of high school organization were broken down, giving way gradually to what is known today as the Credit System. The more flexible approach to school programs finally recognized students' individual abilities and interests, instead of being arranged primarily for administrative convenience, or for those bound for university. New courses were

added to the curriculum, and traditional ones were given new life.

7

Textbooks

The quantity and quality of textbooks improved markedly through the sixties, and significant new emphasis was placed on Canadian texts. In 1960, teachers had a choice from only 300 titles by 25 publishers. Today they can choose from over 1,300 books from more than 80 publishers. Almost all of the textbooks approved for use in Ontario classrooms are written by Canadians.

In recent years there has also been a great surge in the production of other learning materials by Canadians, and this was reflected in our publication last year of a 160-page catalogue of Canadian curriculum materials.

The creation of larger school jurisdictions throughout the province has yielded many tangible benefits, the most important being the broadening of educational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of Ontario young people, bringing us ever closer to that elusive goal of equality.

Another major advance of the 1960's was strong legislation which gave our French-speaking young people a realistic opportunity to obtain a complete education in their maternal language. This province now has a network of French secondary schools in all areas with a substantial concentration of French-speaking people. Even this year, we have moved ahead further with new legislation that will increase and significantly improve these opportunities.

All of these and other developments of the 1960's brought us confidently into the 1970's, setting the stage for a period of adjustment, refinement and consolidation for further improvement in Ontario education.

8

The ceilings

In 1971, however, another factor emerged which temporarily distracted the attention of many people away from purely educational matters. This new factor was the well-expressed concern of the public—not only in Ontario but across Canada and North America as well—over the rapidly-increasing amounts of money being spent by governments, both provincial and local, on education.

At the local level, this concern was reflected by increasing demands that the provincial government pay a larger share of the total cost of elementary and secondary education. This request was met in Ontario, as the government raised its share of the total cost to 60 per cent, and as a result mill rates in many areas were reduced or at least remained constant.

At the same time, public attitudes toward education spending led us in 1971 to place limits on the amounts by which a school board could increase its per-pupil spending from one year to the next. The citizens of the province, long having demonstrated their willingness to invest heavily to expand and improve their schools, had come to the conclusion that huge annual increases in education budgets were not essential for further improvement in the quality of education.

It is not difficult to see why this new public mood developed, and why questions were asked about the seemingly endless amounts of money being poured into education:

—Between 1965 and 1972, a period of just seven years, general legislative grants from the province to school boards more than tripled, passing the billion dollar mark for the first time.

—The annual increases in the total cost of elementary and secondary education were questionable, even after allowing for the enrolment increases, program changes and improvements in teacher qualifications.

—During the three years preceding 1971, per-pupil spending for elementary and secondary education in Ontario jumped by an average of over 13 per cent a year.

With this and other evidence at hand, thoughtful public opinion crystallized to demand that expenditure rates in education be controlled—as a means of protecting citizens against further unrestrained increases in general taxes as well as property taxes due to education.

The policy of placing a limit on how much a school board could increase its per-pupil spending each year has now been in effect for over three years—and it has clearly achieved its intended purpose without adversely affecting the quality of education in Ontario classrooms, which we have worked so long and so persistently to achieve.

Earlier this year, the editor of the newspaper *Financial Times of Canada* wrote a perceptive editorial in which he said:

This is an age of bombast. There has been a loss of proportion in assessing the events of our own time. Every disturbance is now liable to be described as a crisis, and every change as a turning point in human history.

What is happening to us, here and now, tends to fill our field of vision so that we lose the perspective to see it as part of the long story of man and to give it whatever modest or important place it deserves in that story.

It is clear to any observer that the expenditure ceilings have tended to fill the field of vision—and cloud the perspective—of a few people in a handful of localities, most particularly those few where large annual spending increases had perhaps become a matter more of habit than of educational necessity. While the vast majority of school boards and teachers throughout Ontario adapted to the ceilings positively and constructively, we heard ominous warnings of impending “crisis” and “disaster” in our schools from a small minority of people, most of whom probably have felt threatened in one way or another.

The proponents of unrest and gloom, while relatively few in number, have been successful in distracting the attention and energy of others away from their prime function of educating our young people. The threatening predictions of disaster in our classrooms have proven to be hollow and with little foundation. In particular, the recent well-organized campaign to stir up public emotion over class size in Metropolitan Toronto has shown itself to be greatly exaggerated and, it might be said, a mere tactic in a larger campaign that is related more to the bargaining table than to concern over quality education.

These many months of sporadic posturing and protests have been as unbecoming as they have been unnecessary. There has been a very undesirable effect on the spirit and morale in many of our schools, and many people have been blinded to the fact that the improvements we achieved in the 1960's are being built upon and expanded even now. In the face of isolated yet noisy claims to the contrary, progress has continued to predominate.

Mr. James Singleton, who is Director of Education for the Halton County Board of Education, said in a speech a few months ago that "in future years we will look upon the era of the financial ceilings as an excellent time of evaluation, priority establishment and soul searching."

Mr. Singleton said that "a new level of evaluation has arisen in the province, and this has been one of the great side benefits of the ceilings."

The spirit of evaluation and accountability throughout Ontario education is not only reflected in the outstanding efforts of most school boards, in streamlining their operation, but also in similar efforts by the Ministry of Education itself.

9 Reorganization of the Ministry

Because it is subject to the same constraints that apply to other areas of the education system in Ontario, the Ministry of Education is not in an

expansive mood. As a result, it has not hired any new program consultant or a professional educator for other roles for about two years. Education officers recruited to fill vacancies during this time have been transferred or seconded from regional offices and teachers' colleges. A very positive result of the constraints within the Ministry has been the new insight and fresh ideas that have enriched the Ministry through the secondments and exchanges that have been arranged with school boards to meet the personnel needs of the Ministry. Another creative response to the need for improvement as well as the need for restraint is the regional reorganization which is about to take place.

In order to provide a more co-ordinated and effective Ministry service in the east and west central region of the province, Regional Offices 7 and 8 will be amalgamated on January 1, 1974. The new Regional Director of the combined 7/8 office will be Mr. L. E. Maki. Mr. Maki has worked for the Ministry for 13 years in various capacities. Most recently he has been a valued member of the staff of the School Business and Finance Branch in the Central Office of the Ministry.

In addition, each regional office will be restructured in 1974 to include curriculum, supervisory and financial service components. The reorganized offices will have the authority and the capability of serving the needs of both the school boards and the Ministry in the years ahead.

Cost and staff restraints will, of course, apply to these offices. Because the offices will be placed under a flat-line budget for the foreseeable future, each regional director will be required to establish priorities and effect economies, as do other components of the educational community.

10

Accountability

Evaluation and accountability are the underlying purposes of a high-priority program which is presently being developed on a pilot basis by the Ministry in co-operation with three local school

boards—Dryden, West Parry Sound and Ottawa separate.

These three projects involve the educational evaluation of local school systems. We are attempting to develop procedures whereby a school system could objectively analyse its specific goals, assess how well these goals are being attained, and examine existing programs. In other words, every aspect of a school system's operation will be investigated in great detail by teachers, parents, students, school administrators and others.

A second project to which the Ministry is giving high priority has as its aim to develop a system which can be adapted by any school board to evaluate its decision-making processes and its allocation of resources to achieve stated objectives.

This project, known as the Educational Resources Allocation System, now involves fifteen school boards throughout the province in developmental projects. All of these involve setting objectives, evaluating present procedures, establishing priorities and considering alternatives.

11 Educational research

Changes in the extensive research program which is funded by the Ministry of Education are also indicative of the new emphasis on evaluation in Ontario education. Over the past two or three years, the Ministry has taken a much firmer grasp on the province's education research program, and already we have seen some dramatic results in terms of addressing our research effort to real problems in Ontario education, with a reduced emphasis on the rather esoteric approach which has long seemed to dominate education research almost everywhere.

Earlier this year, the report of a UNESCO Committee on education was released, and it is now receiving worldwide attention. The report urges new directions in education that are strikingly parallel to those developed in Ontario

since the mid-1960's. The report is called *Learning to Be*, or more commonly the *Faure Report*, after Mr. Edgar Faure, former Minister of Education of France who chaired the international committee.

Alvin Toffler, author of the controversial book *Future Shock*, has recently focussed his attention more closely on education. His new book, *Learning for Tomorrow*, will be published early next year. Mr. Toffler was recently quoted as saying that the basic assumption that is draining school systems—an assumption he called deceptive and dangerous—is that the future will be like the present. He contends that American schools are preparing children for a society that no longer exists, when they *should* be producing people who are inventive and can cope with change. This is precisely the direction in which we have been moving in Ontario.

Relatively speaking, by just about any measure of comparison, we have in Ontario a pre-eminent school system. We are providing a varied curriculum for boys and girls who will be adults in a very complex society at the turn of the century. We have broken some of the rigid patterns of the past, but we have retained the excellence that has long been the hallmark of our schools.

As in all times of transition, there have been doubts and fears expressed, and voices raised in concern and even alarm. But we are moving forward on a base of sound philosophy, research and practicality—advancing with the times in the light of what is, and will be, most appropriate to our fundamental aim of preparing our young people for the future.

12 Basic skills

Over the past few years, there has been genuine concern in the minds of some parents that one result of this period of evolutionary change has been a reduced emphasis on the so-called basics in our elementary schools. To a great extent, this concern has been the result of new methods rather than changes in content or emphasis. All through

the elementary grades, it remains a firm Ministry requirement that the fundamental skills like reading, spelling, writing and arithmetic be taught thoroughly to all pupils in our schools.

All of these areas are covered very thoroughly in the curriculum documents which are provided to all schools by the Ministry, and teachers and pupils devote just as much time to the basics as they ever did. The basic skills are often handled in a more natural and integrated way than in the past, but there is no evidence whatsoever that they are being neglected.

It seems clear that the suspicion that basic skills are being underplayed in our schools arises primarily from the fact that not every child in the room will memorize the answer to six-times-seven or how to spell a word like “whiff” on the same day, or in the same week, or even in the same month.

This is the essence of what is meant by “individuation” in the classroom. No two children, even a brother and a sister, learn at the same rate or in the same way. Fortunately, good teachers today are flexible in their expectations and their method of instruction, recognizing the individual capabilities of each of the children in their classes. In a word, the approach is not to fail some, but to teach all.

A related concern that has been expressed in recent years is that “discipline” and “hard work” have somehow lost their importance in the schools. This is not so. It is no secret that a pleasant, well-disciplined classroom atmosphere results in more effective learning for all, and that teachers themselves, to a large extent, create the climate in their classrooms. All teachers strive for good discipline.

Anyone who has visited elementary school classrooms in recent years will know that the best classes are places where, at various times during the day, there may be small groups of pupils working together, while the teacher moves about, teaching, encouraging and assisting. In these and similar types of learning situations which are common today, there is certainly more activity than most of today’s parents may remember from their own school days. But it is inaccurate to equate this with poor discipline.

Gradual change will continue to evolve in our elementary schools throughout the 1970's as our educators, building upon the strong foundation that now exists, adapt to changing times and changing needs.

13 Special education

An area that has long received major emphasis both in the Ministry of Education and in our school systems is Special Education—and the services provided to those who seek advice and assistance regarding programs for exceptional children of all types, including those with learning disabilities, the physically disabled, and children who are retarded, emotionally disturbed, deaf or blind.

As it continues to be a prime responsibility of the Ministry to ensure that our efforts in Special Education are closely related to the needs of those we serve, we have established a Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education. This council will be of great assistance to us, both immediately and in the longer term. Its chairman is Rev. Grant Macdonald of Waterloo, who is Chairman of the Waterloo County Board of Education—and it includes eight other outstanding persons, all of whom have a deep interest in problems related to all areas of Special Education.

14 Mandatory English and Canadian studies

In the secondary schools of Ontario, refinement will be the essential characteristic of this decade, following a five- or six-year period in which the secondary school program took a promising new turn towards the future with the introduction of the Credit System.

Ever since the Credit System was first introduced five years ago, we have made it clear that the program would be subject to modification if it became clear that such was needed. We have

monitored the effects of, and reaction to, the new program with extreme care. A variety of very practical research studies was commissioned, and depth surveys of opinion have been conducted among teachers, students, parents, principals, administrators and others.

A critical finding that has emerged clearly from this elaborate and thorough research process is that, while the vast majority are in strong support of the principles of the Credit System, there are one or two aspects of the program which are of concern, and which are tending to cloud the acknowledged strong and positive features of the program.

Beyond this, there is also a wide public consensus, with which we concur, that it not be left to chance that secondary school students acquire a deeper understanding and appreciation of the English language and of Canada itself.

Our schools must help students acquire effective communication skills in the English language—to learn how to organize ideas in a logical manner, and to communicate with others clearly and effectively in writing and in oral speech.

And in these days of world turmoil and uncertainty, it is of great and increasing importance that our young people come to appreciate and understand this country of ours—Canada—its culture, its heritage, and its national identity—and to have confidence in our unique place and status in the community of nations.

Therefore, beginning next September, it will become a requirement under the Credit System that each student entering the first year of secondary school successfully complete at least four credits in English Studies and two credits in Canadian Studies to qualify for a secondary school graduation diploma.

In making English Studies mandatory for all students, schools can include not only the traditional courses in English, but also related courses in creative writing, special areas of literature, drama, or any other courses which develop communication skills in the English language.

Canadian studies also deserve a prominent place in our schools, and this is why we are giving them mandatory status under the Credit System. It has in recent years become very fashionable to speak about our pursuit of a national identity—but let no one be fooled that this is merely a temporary fad. We are witnessing a highly significant maturing of public opinion on Canada's unique place in the world.

Never has it been so clear that the unique heritage and culture of Canada and Canadians should be cherished and strengthened. Pride in our country and a genuine sense of patriotism should be considered national priorities, and the schools have an essential role to play in this regard.

Under the Credit System, Canadian Studies will be given a broad interpretation. The starting point is certainly Canadian history, which simply must be presented as something more than explorers in canoes battling rushing waters. This history of Canada and its development over the last hundred years is an exciting and inspiring story—and good teachers, given support and encouragement, can certainly portray it as such.

Canadian Studies will also include, however, other courses related to our geography, our political systems, urban studies and other curriculum areas which focus on Canada and Canadians, and will be designed to develop a critical awareness of Canadian society, although not separate from the world society of which it is a part.

The Ministry of Education has already published a new Intermediate History curriculum guideline which covers such areas as Canada's multi-cultural heritage, Canada's relationships with the United States, and contemporary Canadian concerns related to a world context.

This is the first in a series of new curriculum guidelines in Canadian studies that will be published by the Ministry. At the same time, we will be encouraging schools and teachers to develop courses with a distinctly Canadian flavour from a number of existing guidelines—in order that students may have a good variety of course selections to meet the new diploma requirement of two credits in this area.

To be of assistance to teachers, the Ministry will publish a comprehensive curriculum bulletin providing background and practical ideas for classroom approaches.

With these changes, we nonetheless retain the essential features of the Credit System in our schools. We shall continue to have an approach to secondary education which truly makes it possible to treat each student individually, rather than as a mere unit in a mass.

We shall continue to have a forward-looking program which permits a student, after fulfilling certain basic course requirements, to choose the balance of his subjects from among a variety of interesting and relevant options, after consultation with teachers, school guidance staff and parents.

15 Flexibility, not rigidity

Through the refined and improved Credit System, we shall continue to have flexibility rather than rigidity. We shall continue to cater to *all* young people instead of only those few who are bound for university.

Further evidence of this flexibility can be seen in a number of developments which are making it possible for increasing numbers of students to earn credits outside of normal school programs.

Last year, for example, over 1,300 secondary school students took courses for credit through the mail through the Ministry's correspondence course service. It is now possible for many students to take summer or evening courses for credit as well.

We believe that the development of educational opportunities which take place outside of the four walls of the school—but under the aegis of schools or school boards—is a healthy and positive sign, and we are encouraging local school boards wishing to experiment in this direction. There is no reason why, for example, students could not earn course

credits in programs similar to those in some universities, whereby a portion of a course is taken in school and a portion is earned "on the job" in actual related work experience in the community.

It is important, however, that any trend towards alternative patterns not be viewed as an escape valve for problem situations in a school. Rather, it must reflect a recognition and acceptance that legitimate learning experiences for students can occur both in and out of school.

For some time we have been concerned about a highly select group of young people aged 14 and 15 who have not seemed to benefit from existing programs. It is our hope and expectation that alternative programs such as I have noted will meet the needs of many of these young people. As an extension of the concept of alternative education, we plan to introduce legislation, effective September 1974, whereby local school board placement committees, which, after full consideration of an individual case, will be empowered to place a 14- or 15-year-old student in an out-of-school program or activity which will be in the best interests of the student. Such a student will remain on the school roll until he reaches the age of 16.

16 High quality high priority

I have said, and will say again, that we in Ontario have developed for our children an education system that is distinguished among others and the envy of many.

As we now consider the spending estimates of \$1,374 billion for the Ministry of Education, I want to reaffirm that the provision of an education system of the highest quality remains one of the principal priorities of this Government. As Minister, my pledge to this House and to the people of Ontario is that we shall continue to move forward, ever mindful that our overriding aim is to prepare young people as well as possible for the life they will lead as adults in our democratic society.



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